

# Buddy Holly Dies

Lubbock Texas: Buddy Holly, Rock and roll pioneer and conservative politician died yesterday, October 26, 2012 in Lubbock, Texas. He was seventy six. Holly leaves his wife of fifty four years Maria Elena Santiago and six children. Funeral plans are pending.

Seen as a rising idol in rock and roll in the late fifties, his early hits like “True Love Ways”, “Peggy Sue”, and “That’ll Be The Day” made him into a rock and roll legend before he was twenty two. Holly’s star went into great descent after a near fatal plane crash in Mason City Iowa in 1959, which killed fellow rock and rollers Richie Valens and The Big Bopper. Nearly every bone was broken in his body and his convalescence took over two years.

When Holly returned to the rock and roll scene in 1961 the landscape that he had helped create in the fifties had vastly changed. Elvis Presley was killed in an army plane crash in Germany one week to the day after Holly nearly died. Chuck Berry was a fugitive from justice after violating the Mann Act in 1960 (he eventually went to prison and served five years), and Little Richard announced his homosexuality to the press in 1959 which killed his career. Jerry Lee Lewis was one of the few major rock stars of the fifties who continued to have a solid career well into the sixties. The pop music scene was in danger of a move backward, with acts like Pat Boone, Paul Anka, and Bobby Rydell threatening to overpower rock and roll music with a less menacing sound reminiscent of the early fifties..

Buddy Holly went to work (without his backing band, the Crickets) in his home studio in Lubbock and produced what Beatle John Lennon later called “the most important rock record ever made”. It was the seminal “Rock 61” in which Holly incorporated country and rhythm and blues influences with rock and roll. The album, which was ingeniously recorded on thirty five millimeter film for its clarity of sound sold over twenty million copies, a record that would hold until Holly broke *that* record in 1966 with “Stories From Texas” a country rock classic that used traditional Nashville musicians along with help from established rockers like Gene Vincent, Phil Spector, Dave Clark, and Brian Wilson. The album sales on that record now hover near the fifty million mark. “Rolling Stone” publisher Jann Wenner said at the time “without this record, I would fear for the future of rock and roll”. Most musicologists of the era place it near or at the top of rock and roll LPs.

Holly also worked with other stars of the time as well. He developed collaborations between soul and rock and roll singers, helping to make an album with Ray Charles and gospel legend Mahalia Jackson. He also had ambitions to work in film, and made several movies in the early sixties, foremost among them a dramatic role in “Judgment At Nuremburg” where he won an Academy Award nomination.

But his love and mission was music. Holly’s popularity endured well after the “British Invasion” of the mid-sixties. He was one of the few American rock and rollers who continued to have hits

well after this period. His verdict on the initial popularity of The Beatles was negative however, saying, “I think they’re just doing me about five years ago”. However, Holly’s later career would set him on a path with the Beatles in an amazing mid-eighties comeback.

After the “Texas” album in 1966, Holly took an extended hiatus with his wife and children in Tampico Mexico, where he maintained a home until his death. His absence from the music scene in the late sixties was felt by many. But Holly, in a press release in 1967 said that he was exhausted from the over ten years of touring and recording and found family life more satisfying than performing. Over the next seven years his record company would continue to release his music, but it consisted of alternative versions of his hits and rare unreleased tracks. There would be no new Buddy Holly product for almost twenty years.

After being away from the spotlight for over seven years, Holly was coaxed back into the public eye not by music, but by politics. He had supported Barry Goldwater’s campaign in 1964 and much to the consternation of his more liberal peers and fans was a supporter of writer/philosopher Ayn Rand in this period as well. However the power of his music, with just two albums of original music in the sixties, overcame the political objections to his right wing bent from the rock and roll aristocracy at the time.

In 1973, Buddy Holly embarked on a crusade, financed by the libertarian Koch brothers (Charles and David), of speeches and television and radio appearances dismissing the last forty years of “liberal policies” in the United States. Holly ran for Congress in 1974 from Lubbock and won, as a Republican, with a very libertarian bias. Most of his fans did not follow him along the political path, but a new set of young people, not necessarily fans of Buddy Holly’s music became vocal supporters of his anti-government, free market agenda. He was the Ron Paul of the seventies.

After winning his seat, Holly said “I feel I have sung all of the songs, written all of the music, and rocked my way to the moon and back for millions of people. Now I want to do something really important, and that is return our nation to its constitutional principles that we have lost over the last couple of generations”. His music career behind him, a nearly forty year old Buddy Holly now danced to a different tune; libertarian ideas and politics.

He ran for president on the Libertarian party ticket in 1980 with David Koch. He received nearly a million votes and was said to have an effect on the ideas coming out of the Reagan camp. His only musical involvement during this time was producing an album for John Lennon in 1982. Lennon, now 72, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in 1980.

The Holly family met tragedy in 1984 when their youngest child, Pete, was killed in a mountain climbing accident in Montana. Many speculated at the time that this led to his leaving politics in 1986, refusing to run for a seventh term. With Buddy Holly out of politics there was great anticipation of perhaps a new album, the first one in twenty years.

He did not disappoint his fans. With the help of the Beatles, who themselves had not cut a record in ten years since the failure of their “Doorpost” album in 1976, Buddy Holly returned to his home studio in Lubbock and produced “Gone But Not Forgotten”. “Gone But Not Forgotten” with the aid of the Beatles, was a three record set of country, blues and “the Lubbock Sound” that reminded the music world that Buddy Holly was far from dead musically. This was his last great statement on LP. It was on Billboard’s top two hundred for over a hundred weeks and sold over twenty million records. With the Beatles as costars and his backup band, Holly went on a worldwide tour in support of the album in 1987, reportedly garnering over one hundred million dollars.

Holly continued to record and perform, often with his old backup group, The Crickets. He also continued to support conservative and libertarian causes throughout the nineties and into the twenty first century. After several modestly received records in the nineties, Buddy Holly retired from performing in 1996 at the age of sixty. He continued to help produce records for his record label. Artists like The Beatles, Otis Redding, Mary Wells, and The Who had major hits under his guidance. He also amassed a fortune in real estate and music publishing. His estimated wealth at his death is nearly five hundred million dollars.

Holly set the template for the standard rock and roll band: two guitars, bass, and drums. He was one of the first in the genre to write, produce, and perform his own songs. Buddy Holly would have been remembered even if he had died in that plane crash in 1959. His legacy is, as Phil Spector put it in 1999 “as the man who everyone in rock and roll owes everything”. Buddy Holly, unlike so many rock stars, lived to see his profound influence and legacy become a fact of rock and roll.